

On Opposition to Proposed ATV Trails in the NHAL State Forest by *Northwoods Citizens for Responsible Stewardship*

NOTE: The following string of e-mails provide an update on recent correspondence with members of Wisconsin's Natural Resource Board (NRB) and with Steve Petersen, Superintendent of the NHAL State Forest.

Northwoods Citizens for Responsible Stewardship believe that these e-mails and the related "Selected Documents Reflecting Opposition to Proposed ATV Trails in the NHAL State Forest," also provide compelling arguments for rejecting the ATV Stakeholder's recommended trails for the NHAL State Forest.

From: FNJSMP@aol.com

To: Steven.Petersen@wisconsin.gov

Cc: Paul.DeLong@wisconsin.gov ; mike@gatheringwaters.org ; mdombeck@uwsp.edu ; bkorth@uwsp.edu ; ptmurray@tds.net ; Jeff.Bode@wisconsin.gov ; tkkratz@facstaff.wisc.edu ; topl@frontiernet.net ; drumsa@centurytel.net ; wsloey@centurytel.net ; Atwatern@aol.com

Sent: Thursday, August 30, 2007 10:19 AM

Subject: Fwd: Splitt - Proposed ATV Trails in the NHAL State Forest

Mr. Steve Petersen, Superintendent
NHAL State Forest
8770 Highway J
Woodruff, WI 54568

Dear Steve:

It was good to meet you, Paul DeLong, and Mike Strigel at the August 15th dedication of the 500th State Natural Area (SNA) in Star Lake ... an SNA that is now facing the potential risk of being exposed to the ravages of a nearby ATV trail.

Since ATVs are ill suited for use in the proximity of this and other such ecologically and socially sensitive areas, consideration of ATV Trails in the NHAL State Forest was a bad idea from the very beginning. So, it should come as no surprise that members of the NRB and other WDNR officials have received comments from many citizens reflecting strong opposition regarding the potential for ATV trails in some of the most sensitive portions of the NHAL State Forest.

It has been particularly vexing for these citizens to hear oxymoronic claims by ATV supporters that they are working to safeguard the forest ecosystem when, in fact, ATV riders pose an intrinsic threat to this ecosystem. Vexing as well was the ATV supporters' seeming sense that this was already a done deal.

The forwarded e-mail to members of the NRB, written on behalf of *Northwoods Citizens for Responsible Stewardship*, addresses the above and other salient issues surrounding the ATV threat to the NHAL State Forest Ecosystem.

For your convenience of reference, a print copy of the attached brief, "Selected Documents Reflecting Opposition to Proposed ATV Trails in the NHAL State Forest," and the E. M. Griffith Forest Restoration and Recreation Area Proposal will be mailed to you forthwith.

Please do not hesitate to call Sue Drum at 715-686-2655, or me at 715-542-2236, if you have questions on any of the above.

Respectfully,

Frank G. Splitt, President
Ballard-Irving-White Birch
Lakes Association
Co-chair, Plum Lake Township Lakes Committee
Member, *Northwoods Citizens for Responsible Stewardship*
<http://www.ncrs.info/>

Forwarded Message:

Subj: Splitt - Proposed ATV Trails in the NHAL State Forest
Date: 8/29/2007 2:51:30 PM Central Standard Time
From: Laurie.Ross@Wisconsin.gov
To: FNJSMP@aol.com

Your email has been distributed to all Natural Resources Board members for their consideration. On behalf of the Board, I would like to thank you for your input on ATV Trails.

Please feel free to contact the Natural Resources Board in the future with additional comments or concerns.

Best regards,

 **Laurie J. Ross**

Executive Staff Assistant

Natural Resources Board

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

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(+) **e-mail:** laurie.ross@wisconsin.gov

From: FNJSMP@aol.com [mailto:FNJSMP@aol.com]
Sent: Wednesday, August 29, 2007 11:15 AM
To: Ross, Laurie J - DNR
Subject: Proposed ATV Trails in the NHAL State Forest

To: Members of the Wisconsin Natural Resources Board: Christine Thomas, Chair, Jonathan Ela, Davis Clausen, Gerald O' Brien, Howard Poulson, John Welter, and Jane Wiley -- c/o Ms. Laurie Ross, Executive Staff Assistant

Dear Member:

This communication follows several of my letters on the subject sent to members of the NRB in recent months. During this span of time, some troubling questions have come to mind:

1. In view of the well known negative environmental impact of ATVs, who had the power to initiate consideration of ATV trails in the NHAL State Forest -- the crown jewel of Wisconsin's northwoods?

2. Why did the WDNR authorize such high-level support staff for the ATV Stakeholder's Group

and then spend thousands of taxpayer dollars to cover the expenses related to their 19 meetings?

3. Given the level of working WDNR oversight, why were the Stakeholders allowed to ignore the WDNR guidelines for sustainable trail development and continue to proceed unabated against strong opposition from the public as well as from reputable scientists and forest resource managers?

4. Why were planned public hearings replaced by a public input booklet and public open house meetings to be held September 17-19, 2007? and

5. Why were the open-house meetings delayed and scheduled at a time when most summer residents have left the area?

Perhaps we will never know the real answers to these questions. However, it appears most likely that the WDNR and state legislators were pressured by the Wisconsin ATV Association (WATVA), www.watva.org/, into consideration of ATV trails in the NHAL State Forest Master Plan as well as the execution of the WDNR's exhaustive ATV trail-seeking effort. Why so? Among other things, the WATVA is dedicated to:

1. Preserving ATVers' rights,
2. Providing ATVers with the opportunity to ride on public lands,
3. Encouraging trail development.

Furthermore, WATVA's president, Randy Harden, was the ATV Stakeholder's chief advocate for the proposed trail system. Also, WATVA has the support of front organizations such as the *BlueRibbonCoalition*, www.sharetrails.org/, and *Tread Lightly*, www.treadlightly.org/. Both organizations defend access for motorized recreation nationwide and are well versed in lobbying legislators and resource management organizations such as the WDNR. This line of thinking prompted me to write the appended letter to the *Lakeland Times* (see Appendix 1).

Howie Wolke's article, "A Blue Ribbon for Deceit," <http://lowbagger.org/blueribbon.html> illuminates much more about the *BlueRibbonCoalition* than can be found at their website. Also copies of the E. M. Griffith Forest Restoration and Recreation Area Proposal discussed in the *Lakeland Times* piece was sent to you and the other members of the NRB by Jennifer Engstad-Heitz in late July.

Finally, it can certainly be argued that the NHAL State Forest is there to be used by all citizens. However, a much more powerful argument can be made that this forest must be protected from uses that, over time, can destroy the forest's ecosystem -- its natural habitat, flora and fauna, as well as peace and quiet -- and mitigate against its sustainability. The attached brief "Selected Documents Reflecting Opposition to Proposed ATV Trails in the NHAL State Forest," provides compelling arguments for rejecting the ATV Stakeholder's recommended trails for the NHAL State Forest. For your convenience of reference, the contents of the brief are listed in Appendix 2. You will be receiving a print copy within the next few days.

On behalf of *Northwoods Citizens for Responsible Stewardship*, I ask that you give thoughtful consideration to all of the above. Your help in eliminating the ATV threat to the NHAL State Forest will be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Frank G. Splitt, President
Ballard-Irving-White Birch
Lakes Association
Co-chair, Plum Lake Township Lakes Committee
Member, *Northwoods Citizens for Responsible Stewardship*
<http://www.ncrs.info/>

APPENDIX 1: The unsustainable ATV trail plan for the NHAL

The Lakeland Times

7/24/2007 9:02:00 AM

To the Editor:

The ATV directive contained in the Northern Highland-American Legion (NHAL) State Forest Master Plan indicates that its objective is to: "Provide sustainable ATV riding opportunities and a quality riding experience with an emphasis on trails that link or are connected to a regional network of ATV trails."

In effect, the ATV directive served to institutionalize the idea that the WDNR not only will allow ATVs to be used in the NHAL, but is actively promoting such usage as well.

A close study of the ATV directive could lead one to believe that it was authored by the litigious-minded *BlueRibbon Coalition* -- a major player in the so called "wise use" movement, a euphemistic name for all of the varied interests from off-road vehicle (such as ATV) groups to extractive industries (miners and loggers) to land developers who oppose nearly every effort to enact and implement laws designed to protect the natural environment.

The WDNR's initial effort to jump start ATV use in the NHAL State Forest involved an attempt to establish an experimental ATV loop trail in the vicinity of the forest's Little Rock Lake in the early fall of 2005. This effort was aborted after vehement opposition by local citizens.

This action precipitated a pivotal moment in what has become an ongoing saga pitting citizens against the ATV marketing forces driving the commercialization of Wisconsin's natural resources - - even its most sensitive.

Rather than examining the wisdom and efficacy of its ATV directive, the NRB elected to continue to press on -- establishing the ATV Stakeholder Group in January 2006 with Dennis Leith, the state forest's previous superintendent, as the group's team leader. The group was activated in April 2006 with a mission to lay out a sustainable ATV trail on the NHAL State Forest. This was truly a daunting assignment given that a sustainable ATV trail on the NHAL is an oxymoron if there ever was one. Why so?

Simply put, a sustainable trail would be one that could be indefinitely maintained and used in such a way that it does not harm the ecosystem in which it is embedded - a sustainable ATV trail would meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs and where sustainability relates to the continuity of an ecosystem, its economic, social, institutional and environmental aspects of the related human society, as well as the non-human related environment.

ATVs are by no means ecosystem neutral. ATVs can and will degrade an ecosystem no matter how careful drivers are to stay on designated trails. ATVs have the inherent capacity to disrupt an ecosystem since they serve as efficient vectors for both aquatic and terrestrial invasive species, not to mention as a source of noise pollution and the extensive damage that can be done by rogue drivers. Based on the above, one is left to wonder why the group recommended ATV trail sites as they did at their final meeting on June 28, 2007.

The group's proposal for a sustainable ATV trail is a real canard. The proposed trail traverses what is likely one of the most sensitive areas of the NHAL State Forest -- the E. M. Griffith Forest Restoration and Recreation Area proposed by the Northwoods Conservation Association and the Environmentally Concerned Citizens of the Lakeland Area back in 1996. This thoughtful proposal called for the establishment of a Northern Lake and Forest Ecosystem Management and Demonstration Area.

Perhaps the WDNR's apparent choice to provide strong support for the development and maintenance of ATV riding opportunities, particularly trails that contribute to regional trail networks, is the answer - notwithstanding the intense opposition of area residents and no matter what the financial and environmental costs.

There is nothing new about short-term thinking. In his 2005 book, "Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed," Jared Diamond spells out the catastrophic consequences of bad choices - what happens when resources are squandered, when the signals from our environment are ignored, and when forests are mismanaged.

At the final meeting of the ATV Stakeholder Group, members were presented with certificates of appreciation on behalf of the WDNR and its forestry division. At the previous (May 31, 2007) meeting, the team leader was presented with the *BlueRibbon Coalition's* "natural resource manager of the year" award. To be sure there were no certificates or awards for members of the public, many of whom are volunteers fighting to protect Wisconsin's water bodies, wetlands, and watersheds from invasive species.

Only time will tell if logic, reason, and common sense will be able to stem the tide of uncontrolled ATV commercial interests that seek to exploit the NHAL State Forest and put at risk the life of the proverbial goose that is laying golden eggs.

Frank G. Splitt, President
Ballard-Irving-White Birch
Lakes Association

APPENDIX 2: Contents Page for "Selected Documents Reflecting Opposition to Proposed ATV Trails in the NHAL State Forest,

1. July 24, 2007, Letter from Peter Murray, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Association of Lakes, to Members of the Natural Resources Board, p. 1.

2. Vilas County Lakes Association Resolution 2007.2, "ATV Trails in the Northern Highland

American Legion State Forest," p. 4.

3. March 12, 2007, Letter from Gail Gilson Pierce, Northern Rivers Alliance Advocate, to Members of the Natural Resources Board, p. 6.

4. The Sloey-Splitt Letters Opposing ATV Trails in the NHAL State Forest," p. 8.

- o ATV stakeholders group took a wrong turn, p. 8.

- o State forest ATV trails need rerouting, p. 9.

- o Proposed state forest ATV trail threatens rare old-growth forest, p. 10.

- o ATV trails in the state forest are tragedy in the making, p. 11.

- o A sustainable ATV trail is a real canard, p. 12.

- o The Unsustainable ATV Trail Plan for the NHAL State Forest, p. 14.

- o The Authors, p. 15.

5. Plum Lake Riparian Homeowners Association Position Regarding ATV Use and Trails in Vilas County, p. 16.

6. July 10, 2007, Letter from Town of Plum Lake Board of Supervisors to the Wisconsin Natural Resources Board, p. 17.

7. July 20, 2007, Letter from Jennifer Engstad-Heitz, Organizing President of the Northwoods Conservation Association, to Members of the Natural Resources Board, p. 18.

8. Tracey Ludvik's July 6, 2007, Wausau Daily Herald article, "ATVs banned on town land in Plum Lake," p. 20.

9. Kurt Krueger's August 15, 2007, Vilas County News-Review article, "ATV trails not needed?," p. 21.

10. August 20, 2007, Letter from Richard Olson to WDNR Secretary Matt Frank, p. 23.

11. References, p. 25.